

SUFFERING  
FLESH ✧  
SPECTACULAR  
BODIES

*CONNECTING COSTUME AND CINEMA THROUGH  
AN ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLISM,  
MYTH AND RITUAL*

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Master of Design

2011

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## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree, except as fully acknowledged within the text. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Louise Fanning

## Acknowledgments

I am extremely grateful to Michael Carter for pointing me towards UTS as the right place to develop my ideas, for his inspiration and for including me in his reading group that has been most helpful. I wish to thank the reading group members Alison Gill, Karen de Perthuis, and Prue Black. An especially heartfelt thank you to my research room buddies, Alejandra Mery Keitel, Anita Marosszeky, Bec Paton, Biz Hayman, Bronwyn Clark-coolee, Cristina Garduño Freeman, Emily Howes, Kevin Su, Liisa Naar, Marie-Elise D'Unienville, Masafumi Monden, Sue Osmond, and Zoe Zadokiersky for their ready welcome, generous spirit and conversation during the arduous task of getting ideas into words on a page. I also thank Ann Hobson, the DAB research Student Administrator, for her encouraging support.

I also wish to express my sincere thanks to my editor Carol Natsis for her diligent and careful work and to my supervisors Professor Peter McNeil and Dr Jonathon Marshall for their exceptional guidance and assistance.

I especially would like to thank my family for their support and belief in me; and particularly my gorgeous Nick for his untiring love and support.

Louise Fanning, Sydney, March 2011

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## Abstract

This thesis connects an understanding of the appearance of the hero in certain contemporary films to the field of costume theory, through an analysis of symbol, myth and ritual. The study has two underlying motivations. The first is that the narratives of many films, consciously or unconsciously, are informed by hero's journey myths, as described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), a work that has been influential in Hollywood film scripting. The second is to understand certain observations made by myself during my work as a costume designer over twenty years. In Chapter 1, I discuss psychoanalyst C. G. Jung's approach to myth and symbol (mentioned by Campbell and often alluded to by film-makers), referring mainly to the appearance of Neo (Keanu Reeves) in the *Matrix* trilogy (1999, 2003) and that of Randy 'the Ram' Robinson (Mickey Rourke) in *The Wrestler* (2008), and drawing upon images from the myths of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth (Sumerian, c. 2000 BCE) and Dionysus (Greek, c. 500 BCE). Chapter 2 extends Jane Gaines' theory of spectacular costume by arguing that the appearance of the hero in films includes certain attributes of culture typical of the ancient magician-king. Rather than simply being 'a sign' for the plot, the hero's often seemingly inexplicable appearance is intended to lift viewers beyond themselves into an experience of the numinous. Continuing with the motif of the hero as magician-king, Chapter 3 discusses the significance of the mask for costume theory. The mask was a motif of the god Dionysus in ancient Greek religious rituals and was used in the Greek tragic theatre of c. 500–400 BCE, performed to honour the god. I show how the closeness of the mask to the body creates a sense of distance or strangeness that has an ambiguous and uncanny representational power; it leads the viewer out of the literal experience of the body to an experience of other selves, felt as an emotional encounter with life. Finally, Chapter 4 further investigates transformation through symbolism of death, or more appropriately 'non-death', which in the hero's journey points towards rebirth. Images of the body in a state of dismemberment and stasis signal the emergence of a new symbol-set for the hero, and also the spectator, that points towards a more vibrant way of showing the effects of living.

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